

Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2005
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

<http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm>
<http://www.icwhen.com/aone/>
<http://a1mag.atari.org>
Now available:
<http://www.atarinews.org>

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
<http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/>

==~==~==

~ EU Says Share the Web! ~ Kids Laptop Unveiled! ~ Online Avatars!
~ FIFA Phishing Scam! ~ Google Triples Search! ~ Microsoft Bad?
~ Hackers Help Microsoft ~ Commodore Resurrected! ~ P2Ps Are Doomed!

- * Phasing Out Microsoft Office *-
- * Colleges Offer More Game Courses! *-
- * U.S. Insists On Keeping Control of Internet *-

==~==~==

->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

It's been another one of those weeks. As you may or may not be aware, I work in a large clinic/hospital north of Boston. Like all hospitals, we're "inspected" by a regulatory agency every four years. Well, our time arrives at the end of the year. Typically, the administration starts to panic around July, trying to prepare for the audit. Logically, you would think that any hospital would get audited, fix any outstanding issues, and continue to comply. In that fashion, future audits would go smoothly. Naturally, most clean up their act in time for the audit, and then resort to all of the bad habits for the next four years. We're probably no different. So, we're doing all of the prep work, bogging everyone down with all of this extra workload. What a waste of time, only to have to repeat it again for the next time. When will everybody learn...?

So, that's been my week, and will likely continue for another couple of months. Meanwhile, the world goes on. The weather around here has started to cool down. I guess autumn is really here. It's a nice time of the year, until the trees start to dump their leaves! Most of my outdoor projects are finally completed, so I guess it's time to renew my indoor ones. Such is life as a homeowner. Well, let's get to our primary reason for being here, and get to the news of the week.

Until next time...

==~==~==

->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
"~~~~~"

CCAG 2005 Postponed

Greetings CCAG 2005 Committee Members, Vendors, and Attendees:

As some of you are aware, we are allowed the use of the National Guard

Armory in Lorain, Ohio because one of our committee members is a member of the National Guard. This allows us to hold this event very inexpensively and free to vendors and attendees. In order for us to hold CCAG at the National Guard Armory in Lorain, he must attend the event.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Rita has activated the National Guard unit that he is in for the next 30 - 45 days. This means he is unavailable for the now previously scheduled event date of October 22, 2005. We intend to reschedule to December 2005, but we do not have a date yet. As soon as we have a date, we will announce it via our email lists and on the website, www.ccagshow.com.

When we have a date, we will reconfirm with all of the dealers - to see how many can attend.

Again, we apologize for late change in plans but it simply can't be helped. It's just one of the non-monetary costs for a free show.

Thank you for your continued support of our show. We hope to see you this December and again - hopefully in April - of next year!

Thomas McLaren
CCAG Webmaster

==~==~==

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It seems that the fates are conspiring against me again. Last week, I couldn't even sit at the computer because of an ear infection. This week, my UseNet provider seems to be asleep on the job. If you have SBC and happened to try to access the NewsGroups on Thursday evening, you know what I mean.

There's lots of stuff going on out in the world that I'm interested in, but this isn't really the forum for it, and I'm not comfortable in breaking a lot of new ground just because my UseNet connection is broken at the moment. Suffice it to say that I think it's more important now than ever that we all... reach. Read things that you wouldn't normally read. Talk to people that you normally wouldn't talk to. Do a job that you normally wouldn't do. In short, it's time for us to expand our horizons and realize that the expansion itself is what's important.

Now, a lot of you who've been reading these columns for a long time and have become accustomed to my rants might think that I'm talking about politics, and you're right. But it's more than that... it's political, it's social, it's... it's whatever we do that deals with interactions with other people.

I've spent a little bit of time lately talking with friends about the "Evolution vs. Intelligent Design" debate. Aside from being an

interesting exercise in Constitutional law, it also showcases the way the human mind works. I'm not going to give you my opinion one way or the other because I think that, where issues like this are concerned, people should be motivated from within to figure out not only what they believe but why. And I really think that that's what this current round of debate boils down to... people deciding not only what they believe but what led them to think as they do.

Let's face it, folks, there are almost as many different trains of thought as there are people. Most of them conflict with most of the others. How do you reconcile them? You could say that you happen to be right and everyone who sees things differently is wrong, but that puts you in a mighty small minority. The chances of YOU being the one to be correct becomes vanishingly small. So are some of us right and some of us just stupid? Oh, don't even let me get started on that one! And what exactly are the chances of a 2-fer? <grin>

In short, I'm really becoming convinced that we're losing the ability to think analytically, and to our detriment, we don't realize it or miss it.

Oh, screw it! I AM going to give you my opinion. Ready? Here it is: Quit being stupid! The Evolution vs. Intelligent Design debate isn't about religion. If it were, the other side (ie: the stupid ones) would be content to teach their own kids in CCD classes or Sunday School and leave actual education to educators. After all, school systems aren't saying that you can't teach your kids about religion, just that THEY'RE not going to do it for you. If you want to believe that the earth is 6,000 years old, that's fine with me. But teach your kids that that's the way it must be and we're going to end up with a whole generation that can't get past the idea that there really are little tiny people inside their televisions.

Well, that's it for this week, folks. Sorry about the lack of UseNet stuff. I'm taking it on faith that my newsgroup server will be back up and running next week. Have a great week and until we meet again, keep your ears open so that you'll hear what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

$$= \sim = \sim = \sim =$$

```
->In This Week's Gaming Section - College Video Game Courses!
    """"""""""
                                Commodore To Reenter Industry!
                                Doom 3! Sly 3!
                                And more!
```

$$= \sim = \sim = \sim =$$

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

More Colleges Offering Video Game Courses

More and more, video game-related courses are being offered in colleges around the country in response to the digital media industry's appetite for skilled workers and the tastes of a new generation of students raised on Game Boy and Xbox.

Animation I, Cognition & Gaming and Computer Music are being offered as part of the year-old minor in game studies at RPI, one of dozens of schools that have added courses or degree programs related to video gaming in recent years.

RPI, which plans to offer a major in the field next year, graduated 27 gaming minors in its first year and expects a jump this year.

"The concept of designing good video games, or designing good human-computer interactions - that's what I'm interested in," said Chelsea Hash, a senior with a video game minor and a major in electronic arts.

From Brooklyn's Pratt Institute to the University of Colorado, at least 50 schools around the country now offer courses in video game study, development or design, according to industry groups.

Some of the schools offer full-blown academic programs. The University of Washington offers a certificate in game design; the Art Institute of Phoenix gives a bachelor of arts in game art and design; and the University of Pennsylvania has a master's in computer graphics and game technology.

Jason Della Rocca, executive director of the International Game Developers Association, said the high number of schools adding programs in the past few years shows how the game industry is maturing.

Della Rocca said that in the early "Space Invader" days of game development, one developer could mentor a handful of workers. Now, games can cost \$10 million to develop and require 200 workers, making the industry hungrier for specialized skills.

RPI humanities dean John Harrington said the idea of teaching about video games in college "brings out the Puritan in some people," but he said the technology-oriented school can't afford to ignore the booming field of digital media.

Administrators at RPI say they developed a serious academic program that marries technology and creativity.

Marc Destefano, who teaches the psychology of play, system dynamics and game theory in his introductory course, wants students to appreciate the interplay of mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics that he says makes a video game work - be it Pac-Man or Resident Evil.

It's not all about design, however: Katherine Isbister teaches students about the social and emotional aspects of gaming. Her research lab looks more like a teen's dream living room with sectional sofa, plasma-screen TV and a shelf full of video games. Less obvious are the cameras that can focus on players' faces.

Many of the academic programs at RPI and elsewhere are still new and are just starting to become a feeder system for the \$10 billion-a-year video game industry.

Della Rocca compares it to the emergence of film studies programs decades ago. Dismissed at first, they now produce big-name directors in a field now considered by many to be a serious art form.

"Just like when rock and roll came of age everybody wanted to be a rock star, as video games have come of age, everyone wants to be a developer," said Carolyn Rauch, senior vice president of the Entertainment Software Association.

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil

It's been just a few months since Vicarious Visions did an admirable job of bringing id Software's graphically superior Doom 3 to the Xbox, but now publisher Activision is already prepping the game's first expansion pack, Resurrection of Evil, as a stand-alone game slated to hit Microsoft's console in October. We just had a chance to get our hands bloody with a demo version of Resurrection of Evil to determine whether this quasi-sequel will maintain the high quality set by its predecessor, as well as to discover any new gameplay goodies that may have been added. If you were impressed by the original Doom 3 on the Xbox, early indications are good that the follow-up will deliver once again.

It's back to hell once again as the UAC sends you to investigate the scene of the slaughter in the first game. Thanks, UAC!

Resurrection of Evil begins with the Union Aerospace Corporation unwisely deciding to reopen the Mars excavation site that acted as the backdrop for all the hellish goings-on in the original game. You'll play the role of a combat engineer who goes in with the initial exploratory team to access some previously sealed ruins. It seems these ruins were closed for a reason, since you quickly encounter a mysterious demonic artifact that promptly slaughters all the other humans in the area and opens a new portal straight to hell. How convenient. Even worse, the forces of the damned - led by the corrupted Dr. Betruger from the original game - are seeking that artifact, so it'll be up to you to both fight off wave after wave of hellspawn and use the device to defeat Betruger and seal up the portal once and for all.

If you played Resurrection of Evil on the PC (or even the original Doom 3 on either platform), you'll know what to expect from the game on the Xbox. You'll essentially run from point A to point B in a given level, looking for the appropriate key card or switch to open up the path to the exit. Of course, you'll obliterate all manner of zombies and hellish demons on the way there, and for that you'll have access to the same massive arsenal that was available in Doom 3. From the shotgun and chaingun to the rocket launcher, grenades, and BFG, there are plenty of ways to fight off hell's armies. The game will offer a few new enemies as well, such as a faster, supercharged version of the imp.

Oh yeah, about that artifact... It confers some nifty powers. As you play, you'll be able to charge the hell weapon with human souls found conveniently in corpses that litter the base. When you unleash that power, you'll be able to slow down time, seriously increase your melee damage

output, and even become invincible, depending on how far you've gotten into the game. It might sound like these hell powers would make the game a little too easy, but at least in the PC version of the game, the difficulty ramps up to the point where you'll need to rely on them.

The hellish artifact will give you some new powers with which to stop the demonic onslaught.

Luckily, the designers threw a couple of other nice upgrades into Resurrection of Evil's weapon lineup on the PC, and those additions are, of course, present on the Xbox. First up is the double-barreled shotgun, which is a nice nostalgic nod to Doom II - and more importantly, an incredibly powerful close-range weapon. But it only holds two shells at a time, so you'll have to use it judiciously. Then you have the grabber, a physics-based weapon that can pick up crates, explosive barrels, and other objects to hurl at enemies. The grabber is even more useful for plucking the demons' fireballs right out of the air and sending them flying right back. Finally, we've observed one addition - or, more accurately, a consolidation - unique to the Xbox version of Resurrection: the flashlight has been merged with the pistol. While this isn't a major change, it's nice to have at least some sort of ranged offensive capability while you're squinting your eyes in the darkest corridors.

This Xbox version of Resurrection of Evil will ship with some other goodies, in addition to the all-new campaign mode. Primarily, there's the competitive multiplayer via Xbox Live, which will feature deathmatch, tournament, and last man standing modes across a variety of new maps. Sadly, though, it looks like the two-player cooperative support that was popular in the Xbox version of Doom 3 has been dropped here. But then, the game will support downloadable content, so you never know. And at least you'll get access to those vaunted PC classics Ultimate Doom, Doom II, and the especially punishing Doom II: Master Levels, which will provide a healthy dose of nostalgia and give you some extra multiplayer madness besides.

The quality of Vicarious Visions' original Doom 3 port surpassed many gamers' expectations, given the apparent limits of the Xbox hardware. After playing through a few missions in the follow-up, it looks like Nerve Software's effort is at least equal, if not superior, to the original. This Xbox version retains a truly impressive amount of the considerable detail present in the PC version, from the normal-mapped characters to the spooky real-time shadowing that's largely responsible for the game's thick sense of atmosphere. Obviously, some corners had to be cut - many textures are noticeably lower resolution, for instance - but overall, what we've seen of the game so far looks remarkably close to the fidelity of the PC original.

The graphics in this Xbox version look surprisingly close to those of the stunning PC original.

Resurrection of Evil features some nice enhancements to the Doom 3 formula, yet that formula remains essentially unchanged here, so your interest in this product ought to be predicated on your satisfaction with the original game. At the least, we can say after blasting through a few levels that the Xbox port quality here looks to be just as solid as it was with the first Doom 3 last April. This "expansion" disc doesn't actually require the original game to run, and Activision is letting it go for a fairly modest \$30. So if you're jonesing for more demonic action on your home theater, Resurrection of Evil will likely satisfy.

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves Ships For Playstation 2

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced today the launch of Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves, a comedic crime caper, action-adventure game designed exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system. Created by Seattle-based developer Sucker Punch Productions, Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves builds upon the award-winning Sly Cooper franchise with an all-new animated adventure allowing players to join Sly and his crew as they struggle against new villains and old adversaries in an effort to recover the Cooper family fortune. Showcasing Sucker Punch's signature toon-shaded artistic style and outstanding storytelling, Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves returns for Sly's most elaborate heist with a variety of new gameplay features, including eight playable characters, 3D gameplay, challenging co-op and head-to-head multiplayer games, new vehicles, mini-games, disguises, enhanced combat move sets and much more.

"Sucker Punch developed a game that will once again attract PlayStation 2 fans of all ages, while providing additional challenges and more in-depth gameplay to suffice hardcore gamers," said Grady Hunt, senior producer, product development, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "While we've stayed true to the aspects of the Sly Cooper franchise players love, we've also added a breadth of new features, sophisticated humor, deeper character development and extensive replay value to deliver an innovative, yet true platform gameplay experience."

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves begins with Sly and his crew in disarray and struggling with setbacks. Bentley was crippled in the final battle with Clockwerk at the end of Sly 2: Band of Thieves and confined to a wheelchair, and Murray, feeling responsible for Bentley's tragic accident, has quit the team and chosen a path of non-violence and solace. Meanwhile, Sly learns of a secret family vault that houses the amassed Cooper family fortune. Upon arriving at this hidden location, Sly discovers another enemy group attempting to steal the Cooper fortune. Sly and Bentley quickly realize they will need considerable help to defeat this new rival. Their recruiting starts with Murray, and once back on-board, Sly, Murray and Bentley set out to enlist some new and familiar faces in an effort to pull off a World Class heist.

True to the evolution of the Sly Cooper franchise, Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves showcases Sucker Punch's critically acclaimed comic-book inspired graphics mixed with a unique combination of stealth and platforming action that has made the previous titles in the series achieve "Greatest Hits" status. Set in exotic and remote locations including China, the Australian Outback and Venice, Italy, players will be drawn into visually stunning worlds that are more dense and interactive than previous installments. In addition to taking on the evolving-roles of Sly and his two partners in crime, Murray and Bentley, gamers will experience a fresh cast of some new and familiar playable characters each with their own distinct move set, including franchise favorites Inspector Carmelita Fox and the Lounge Lizard Dimitri. Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves also takes the "heist" gameplay mechanic introduced in Sly 2: Band of Thieves to the next level as team missions are built around the playable characters on-screen simultaneously collaborating rather than switching off between characters.

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves also includes 3D glasses, where, in certain areas of the game, players can opt to play in 3D. The introduction of 3D allows players to experience an unprecedented amount of depth and realism, as they watch objects fly off the screen and characters and environments

come to life.

Players hungry for a more in-depth gameplay experience will have the opportunity to complete Master Thief Challenges and replay missions, thus providing an opportunity to sneak around an environment again using alternative moves and disguises in order to achieve even higher Master Thief ratings. The added replay value also will allow players to replay the majority of missions in 3D and locate special objectives and rewards. In the new multiplayer mode, players will play head-to-head and cooperative missions that have their own special power-ups.

Commodore Gears Up To Re-Enter Game Industry

Yeahronimo Media Ventures, owner of the Commodore license, has announced its intention to return the brand to gaming. Yeahronimo will work with the Content Factory to form a new company, called Commodore Gaming, that produces software and hardware to exploit its back catalog of retro games.

Yeahronimo acquired the Commodore license early in the year, and is only now announcing its plans for the brand. Content Factory will contribute 18 million Euros (\$21.62 million USD) to the venture, 6 million of which is payment for a 49% interest in the company and 12 million in cash to be paid out over the course of five years.

The new company will produce standalone TV devices similar to the wildly successful Atari and Pac-Man self-contained units, as well as software packages akin to Intellivision Lives or Atari Anthology. Furthermore, the Commodore Games label will produce original game licenses as a more traditional games publisher.

"The business will be developed in three phases," said Yeahronimo CEO and President Ben van Wijhe. "Initially, the focus will be on exploiting the numerous existing C64 retro game licenses through plug-and-play, mobile and handheld devices. The second phase will be to create a range of specialised gaming hardware products and accessories."

"The third phase will be to work with Commodore's existing partners to issue new game licenses under the Commodore brand name, focusing primarily on the mobile and handheld market in addition to the PC and console market, which have its stronger licenses."

==~==~==

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Insists on Keeping Control of Web

A senior U.S. official rejected calls on Thursday for a U.N. body to take

over control of the main computers that direct traffic on the Internet, reiterating U.S. intentions to keep its historical role as the medium's principal overseer.

"We will not agree to the U.N. taking over the management of the Internet," said Ambassador David Gross, the U.S. coordinator for international communications and information policy at the State Department. "Some countries want that. We think that's unacceptable."

Many countries, particularly developing ones, have become increasingly concerned about the U.S. control, which stems from the country's role in creating the Internet as a Pentagon project and funding much of its early development.

Gross was in Geneva for the last preparatory meeting ahead of November's U.N. World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia.

Some negotiators from other countries said there was a growing sense that a compromise had to be reached and that no single country ought to be the ultimate authority over such a vital part of the global economy.

But Gross said that while progress was being made on a number of issues necessary for producing a finalized text for Tunis, the question of Internet governance remained contentious.

A stalemate over who should serve as the principal traffic cops for Internet routing and addressing could derail the summit, which aims to ensure a fair sharing of the Internet for the benefit of the whole world.

Some countries have been frustrated that the United States and European countries that got on the Internet first gobbled up most of the available addresses required for computers to connect, leaving developing nations with a limited supply to share.

They also want greater assurance that as they come to rely on the Internet more for governmental and other services, their plans won't get derailed by some future U.S. policy.

One proposal that countries have been discussing would wrest control of domain names from the U.S.-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, and place it with an intergovernmental group, possibly under the United Nations.

Gross dismissed it as unacceptable.

"We've been very, very clear throughout the process that there are certain things we can agree to and certain things we can't agree to," Gross told reporters at U.N. offices in Geneva. "It's not a negotiating issue. This is a matter of national policy."

He said the United States was "deeply disappointed" with the European Union's proposal Wednesday advocating a "new cooperation model," which would involve governments in questions of naming, numbering and addressing on the Internet.

In 1998, the U.S. Commerce Department selected ICANN to oversee the Internet's master directories, which tell Web browsers and e-mail programs how to direct traffic. Internet users around the world interact with them everyday, likely without knowing it.

Although ICANN is a private organization with international board members, Commerce ultimately retains veto power. Policy decisions could at a stroke make all Web sites ending in a specific suffix essentially unreachable. Other decisions could affect the availability of domain names in non-English characters or ones dedicated to special interests such as pornography.

EU Wants Shared Control of Internet

The European Union insisted Friday that governments and the private sector must share the responsibility of overseeing the Internet, setting the stage for a showdown with the United States on the future of Internet governance.

A senior U.S. official reiterated Thursday that the country wants to remain the Internet's ultimate authority, rejecting calls in a United Nations meeting in Geneva for a U.N. body to take over.

EU spokesman Martin Selmayr said a new cooperation model was important "because the Internet is a global resource."

"The EU ... is very firm on this position," he added.

The Geneva talks were the last preparatory meeting before November's World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia.

A stalemate over who should serve as the principal traffic cops for Internet routing and addressing could derail the summit, which aims to ensure a fair sharing of the Internet for the benefit of the whole world.

At issue is who would have ultimate authority over the Internet's master directories, which tell Web browsers and e-mail programs how to direct traffic.

That role has historically gone to the United States, which created the Internet as a Pentagon project and funded much of its early development. The U.S. Commerce Department has delegated much of that responsibility to a U.S.-based private organization with international board members, but Commerce ultimately retains veto power.

Some countries have been frustrated that the United States and European countries that got on the Internet first gobbled up most of the available addresses required for computers to connect, leaving developing nations with a limited supply to share.

They also want greater assurance that as they come to rely on the Internet more for governmental and other services, their plans won't get derailed by some future U.S. policy.

Policy decisions could at a stroke make all Web sites ending in a specific suffix essentially unreachable. Other decisions could affect the availability of domain names in non-English characters or ones dedicated to special interests such as pornography.

Massachusetts Plans To Phase Out Microsoft Office

The state government of Massachusetts is moving ahead on a plan to switch to the OpenDocument standard by 2007, effectively phasing out the use of Microsoft Office.

The shift is part of a larger technology scheme in the state that has been discussed among the state's legislators and technology vendors, including Microsoft, Adobe, Corel, IBM and Sun Microsystems.

Massachusetts invited the vendors to weigh in on their proposals, prompting a wealth of letters about whether the state should go forward with a move to an open, nonproprietary format for office documents.

Some companies, like Corel, encouraged the state to adopt open standards, while other companies cautioned the state to consider the costs that would be involved with such a transition.

In its letter to Massachusetts, Microsoft noted that the adoption of a single format for office documents throughout all agencies would prevent users from tapping into "well-established technologies."

The letter's author, Microsoft general manager Alan Yates, also wrote that the approach would run afoul of procurement norms without "due consideration for the enormous costs and technical challenges that stem from the proposal."

Microsoft has tried to emphasize that it has an open format in the current version of Office 2003.

"We would have liked a greater opportunity to explain how openness is possible with Office," Yates said. "We've found a very positive reaction to our open formats and our approach, and there's a growing awareness there."

Despite Microsoft's attempts to delay the Massachusetts decision by sparking more discussion on the topic, the state is expected to undergo a phased-migration plan away from productivity suites that do not support OpenDocument.

Suites that will be phased in include OpenOffice, StarOffice, KOffice and IBM Workplace. The state expects that Microsoft Office will be out of its agencies by January 1, 2007.

Massachusetts' decision follows that of other government agencies in the world, notably in Germany and Norway, but it is the first public-sector institution in the United States to take such a step.

Sun Releases StarOffice 8

Sun Microsystems has released StarOffice 8, the newest iteration of the company's office-productivity suite that now offers better compatibility with Microsoft Office files.

StarOffice includes word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, drawing and database applications. It is expected to compete with Microsoft Office, especially for companies that want to reduce licensing costs.

The release comes just a day after the state of Massachusetts said that it will adopt the OpenDocument format, an open standard designed to make file sharing easier between office applications. Sun has noted that StarOffice 8 is the first commercial office suite that uses the open format.

"This is part of our overall effort to ensure all customers - from students to governments to enterprises - have access to information in an open, secure and freely available fashion independent of any vendor or product," said John Loiacono, executive vice president of Sun's software group.

In selling StarOffice 8, it is likely that Sun will make a major push toward touting the software's ability to provide measurable benefits in the short term, said IDC analyst Dan Kusnetzky.

Enterprises have been keen to reduce the costs associated with information technology, especially software licensing, making StarOffice potentially attractive to a range of companies.

"It could be used to reduce the software costs for desktop or mobile computers while keeping staff-related costs in check," said Kusnetzky.

In particular, he said, the latest version of StarOffice could be used to oust Microsoft Office installations because it offers increased compatibility with Office documents.

Sun also is expanding the StarOffice software-publisher model to increase retail distribution worldwide. The company unveiled new agreements with Encore and Avanquest. Encore has extensive retail and wholesale distribution channels in the U.S. and Canada, while Avanquest will offer the software in 10 countries across Europe.

The added distribution clout and aggressive focus on StarOffice by Sun could help boost adoption significantly, Kusnetzky noted, especially as the OpenDocument format garners more attention.

Patent Office Rules Against Microsoft

In a decision that could send massive shockwaves around the Internet-development community, the U.S. Patent Office has ruled that Microsoft infringed upon the plug-in patent held by the University of California and its Eolas Technology spin-off.

In finding that Microsoft's widely used plug-in technology was an infringement, the patent office affirmed a jury decision, handed down in 2003, that awarded more than \$500 million in damages to the university and to Eolas.

In March 2005, an appeals court had overturned the 2003 decision and ruled partially in favor of Microsoft, saying that the company should be allowed to present evidence that its own technology predated the Eolas patent application.

A spokesperson for University of California said Thursday that this week represents the second time the patent office has thoroughly vetted and upheld the Eolas patent.

Joe Wilcox, an analyst at Jupiter Research, said the patent is broad in its

scope and advised businesses to wait and see how any appeals case might play out before shifting gears or ditching development projects.

Even if Microsoft's appeals are successful, the other companies using the technology will not be free and clear. That, Wilcox said, will depend on what Eolas decides to do with its patent and how other vendors react to its claims. "Will Eolas seek licensing agreements from other companies?" Wilcox asked. "And will those companies respond?"

If a Microsoft appeal fails, the effects of the decision might extend to any company that has or uses plug-ins, such as Macromedia and its Flash plug-in.

But, said Wilcox, no matter how the chips might fall, the patent ruling could be a good thing for Microsoft and Internet Explorer in general, given the security problems associated with the company's ActiveX plug-in technology.

According to Wilcox, Redmond might be facing a forced opportunity to overhaul and reinvent its plug-in architecture. "Microsoft should use this as incentive to come up with something that is more extensible and more secure," he said.

Doing so would have an affect on every piece of software that plugs in to the Web browser and everyone who visits sites that require use of plug-in technology. But in the long run, said Wilcox, reconfiguring the browser could be a positive move for the company.

"Internet Explorer is so widely used it would basically affect everyone who uses the Internet."

While disappointed with the Patent Office decision, Microsoft is vowing to continue its six-year fight against the suit.

File-Sharing Doomed, Warns Exec

Peer-to-peer file-sharing companies in the U.S. will cease to exist in their current forms over the next few months, the president of MetaMachine, the company responsible for the eDonkey software, predicts.

Speaking at a Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, Sam Yagan said that in order to avoid expensive litigation, file-sharing companies will have to change their models to become similar to iTunes or the new Napster or face expensive legal battles.

MetaMachine won't be an exception. "Because we cannot afford to fight a lawsuit - even one we think we would win - we have instead prepared to convert eDonkey's user base to an online content retailer operating in a 'closed' P-to-P environment," he said.

Yagan's comments have been posted on a Senate Web site. MetaMachine created the eDonkey P-to-P software client.

Companies like MetaMachine, he explains, will have to comply with terms of deals made by entertainment rights aggregators and to do so they'll have to build centralized indexed searches, filters and closed networks in order to ensure that their users aren't conducting illegal file sharing. Such a

setup is different than most P-to-P file-sharing companies today, which usually don't have centralized servers holding content.

This dramatic change is happening as a result of the Supreme Court's ruling in June on the MGM v. Grokster case. The court ruled that someone who offers a tool and promotes the use of the tool to infringe on copyright is liable for the user's infringement. Since that decision, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has sent cease-and-desist letters to leading P-to-P companies including MetaMachine, threatening litigation based on the RIAA's interpretation of the ruling.

Yagan concludes that because the court hasn't offered a standard to define how to measure whether a company is inducing users to infringe, any litigation will result in exhaustive trial proceedings during which organizations like the RIAA will dig up company e-mails, advertising, and any other evidence that might prove the file-sharing company intended to induce copyright infringement. Such a process would be just too expensive for most P-to-P companies, he said.

In August, CacheLogic, a company that provides traffic management services to telecommunication companies, released a survey that found that eDonkey has surpassed BitTorrent as the world's largest P-to-P file trading network.

In addition to eDonkey, it appears that other file-sharing companies may indeed be changing their models or shutting down, while the popularity of paid services is increasing. On Tuesday, BitTorrent announced it hired Doll Capital Management to help it raise \$8.75 million in funding. The money will be used to support the global growth of BitTorrent's technology into a leading platform for the legal and secure distribution of content for commercial purposes, according to a statement from BitTorrent. While BitTorrent's leaders have historically said they aren't interested in supporting piracy, the funding may be used to make changes that can help solidify the company's role as a legal content distribution player.

Another file-sharing company, WinMX, appears to have recently shut down its operations as its Web page is no longer accessible. However, rumors online have WinMX leaders relocating outside of the U.S., thus fulfilling another of Yagan's expectations.

He suggests that a wide variety of technology companies will choose to locate outside of the U.S. to avoid such potential lawsuits. "It's hard to imagine future 'open decentralized' P-to-P companies opening shop as American corporations," he said. "Where are the Skypes of tomorrow being founded? Your best bet is to look offshore."

Google To Triple Search Scope

Google Inc. said late on Monday that it was tripling the number of Web pages that its system can search, seeking to upstage rival Yahoo Inc. in claims to be the world's widest Web search.

But Google also said it would no longer publicize the number of Web pages available from any search - calling a halt to what analysts say has become an increasingly meaningless size competition.

Instead of focusing on the millions of page results that broad-based

searches can generate, Google is asking readers to compare searches done on Google and Yahoo for the relevance of search results to the individual user.

"We believe that we have an index that is three times larger (without counting duplicate pages)," Marissa Mayer, Google's director of consumer Web products and product manager for Google.com, said in a phone interview.

"We are asking our readers to test for themselves," she said.

To check relevance Mayer encouraged Web users to evaluate for themselves by testing relatively obscure search terms that produce less than 1,000 results. This is where tripling the depth of Google's search database is most useful, she said.

Google had previously estimated it searched 8 billion pages. Mayer declined to offer specific numbers to back up Google's new claim of three times that figure.

"Absolute numbers are no longer useful," Mayer said.

Google's move follows Yahoo's claim in August that it had significantly boosted the scope of its search results to some 19.2 billion pages, topping Google in the total size of its Web search database for the first time in years.

Google has contested Yahoo's claims, saying that its own staff and a variety of independent experts are unable to replicate Yahoo's assertion. Yahoo pioneered Web search in 1994 but was upstaged by Google's search system in the late 1990s.

Analyst Danny Sullivan, editor of SearchEngineWatch.com, said that counting pages - either by company reported index counts or by anecdotal user checks of actual queries - does little to prove who offers the more comprehensive search.

"Users will be the best judge of which search engine is the most appropriate," Sullivan said.

"The fact that you have picked up more content in a particular search result doesn't mean you have found better information. It just means you have found more pages," the search expert said.

September is the seventh anniversary of when Google launched operations in September, 1998. Google said its search system now indexes 1,000 times more Web pages than it did in its first month of operation.

"Dropping the home page count is a positive move that I think helps defuse the entire 'size wars' situation," Sullivan wrote on his site after being briefed by Google on the move.

FIFA Warns Over Internet 'Phishing' Scam

FIFA warned that its name is being abused in an Internet scam involving "phishing," the illegal use of account holders' details, obtained and generally used online.

World football's governing body said unsolicited, official-looking e-mails were being sent worldwide claiming the recipient had won a lottery and requesting their bank account details to receive the payment.

"FIFA is concerned because these lotteries claim to be organized on behalf of, or in association with, FIFA," as well as the German organizers of the 2006 World Cup and their South African counterparts for the 2010 tournament.

"FIFA confirms that these lotteries have no connection with or authorisation from FIFA."

"FIFA also believes that it is unlikely that these lottery companies have any official connection with either the Local Organising Committee for the 2006 FIFA World Cup or the 2010 FIFA World Cup."

The different lotteries claim to be operated by companies based in countries including South Africa, Spain and Britain, FIFA said.

It said it was in touch with authorities in the countries concerned, where criminal investigations could be launched.

FIFA said the public should treat such lottery e-mails with "extreme caution" and refrain from handing over personal and financial details.

Hackers Advise Microsoft on IE

Microsoft showed off its preliminary work on the second beta version of Internet Explorer 7 at the Hack in the Box Security Conference here, and came away with some good feedback, company managers said Thursday.

"It's the first time we've ever come out ahead of a product release to present and get feedback," said Tony Chor, group program manager at Microsoft's Internet Explorer team, referring to the company's presentation to a hacker-specific group.

Chor and colleague Andrew Cushman, director of Microsoft's security engineering and communication group, spoke highly of the comments they heard at the presentation. They said they preferred the term "security research community" for attendees, instead of "hacker."

"Hacker has a negative connotation, like a criminal," said Cushman. People such as attendees of the Hack in the Box conference approach security from a very different, very valuable perspective, he added.

"This community is a good source of information and we haven't availed ourselves of that source," said Cushman.

Chor went a step further, saying Microsoft has maintained an "adversarial" relationship with the hacking community in the past, but "that wasn't working. It just made them mad and we didn't benefit from their passion and expertise."

But the software giant is putting that past behind it, and its goal is to engage the "security research community" more in the future, presenting at more hacker conventions and giving them a chance to critique some of Microsoft's work ahead of releases.

Chor and Cushman also handed out their business cards liberally, and hope to get more e-mail responses from people, as well as notes on their blog, they said.

"People had a lot of good suggestions, and asked a lot of good questions," said Chor.

Some conference attendees gave Microsoft high marks for showing off some new security features on the Web browser and seeking their views, adding they would have liked to hear more technical detail on new features in IE7 Beta 2. But their impression was the presenters appeared almost apologetic, and the hackers don't plan to switch to any Microsoft products near term, at the expense of, say, Mozilla's Firefox browser.

Chor said he plans to increase the amount of technical detail in future presentations.

The Beta 2 version of IE7, currently under construction at Microsoft, will likely be ready by the end of the year, said Chor.

One new feature on the Web browser is it runs in higher security "Protected Mode" by default, set at a lower user privilege. In protected mode, all downloads and other packages are automatically dropped in the "temporary Internet files" folder, so malware can't be deposited on the hard disk. In the temporary folder, IE and Windows treat the files as dangerous and they're given no privileges to move about.

With add-ons like a Google toolbar or ActiveX, IE7 Beta 2 will offer more permission prompts, since downloads such as ActiveX opt-ins can be an avenue for attack, Chor said.

Microsoft will license its "Protected Mode" innovation to other developers for free to help spread its use, and increase security, Chor said.

For businesses, Microsoft added a "Compatibility Mode" that works when a person is using the company's intranet and allows them to drop files wherever they want to on their PCs.

Design of \$100 Laptop for Kids Unveiled

The \$100 laptop computers that Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers want to get into the hands of the world's children would be durable, flexible and self-reliant.

The machines' AC adapter would double as a carrying strap, and a hand crank would power them when there's no electricity. They'd be foldable into more positions than traditional notebook PCs, and carried like slim lunchboxes.

For outdoor reading, their display would be able to shift from full color to glare-resistant black and white.

And surrounding it all, the laptops would have a rubber casing that closes tightly, because "they have to be absolutely indestructible," said Nicholas Negroponte, the MIT Media Lab leader who offered an update on the project Wednesday.

Negroponte hatched the \$100 laptop idea after seeing children in a Cambodian village benefit from having notebook computers at school that they could also tote home to use on their own.

Those computers had been donated by a foundation run by Negroponte and his wife. He decided that for kids everywhere to benefit from the educational and communications powers of the Internet, someone would have to make laptops inexpensive enough for officials in developing countries to purchase en masse. At least that's Negroponte's plan.

Within a year, Negroponte expects his nonprofit One Laptop Per Child to get 5 million to 15 million of the machines in production, when children in Brazil, China, Egypt, Thailand, South Africa are due to begin getting them.

In the second year - when Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney hopes to start buying them for all 500,000 middle and high-school students in this state - Negroponte envisions 100 million to 150 million being made. (He boasts that these humble \$100 notebooks would surpass the world's existing annual production of laptops, which is about 50 million.)

While a prototype isn't expected to be shown off until November, Negroponte unveiled blueprints at Technology Review magazine's Emerging Technologies conference at MIT.

Among the key specs: A 500-megahertz processor (that was fast in the 1990s but slow by today's standards) by Advanced Micro Devices Inc. and flash memory instead of a hard drive with moving parts. To save on software costs, the laptops would run the freely available Linux operating system instead of Windows.

The computers would be able to connect to Wi-Fi wireless networks and be part of "mesh" networks in which each laptop would relay data to and from other devices, reducing the need for expensive base stations. Plans call for the machines to have four USB ports for multimedia and data storage.

Perhaps the defining difference is the hand crank, though first-generation users would get no more than 10 minutes of juice from one minute of winding.

This certainly wouldn't be the first effort to bridge the world's so-called digital divide with inexpensive versions of fancy machinery. Other attempts have had a mixed record.

With those in mind, Negroponte says his team is addressing ways this project could be undermined.

For example, to keep the \$100 laptops from being widely stolen or sold off in poor countries, he expects to make them so pervasive in schools and so distinctive in design that it would be "socially a stigma to be carrying one if you are not a student or a teacher." He compared it to filching a mail truck or taking something from a church: Everyone would know where it came from.

As a result, he expects to keep no more than 2 percent of the machines from falling into a murky "gray market."

And unlike the classic computing model in which successive generations of devices get more gadgetry at the same price, Negroponte said his group expects to do the reverse. With such tweaks as "electronic ink" displays that will require virtually no power, the MIT team expects to constantly

lower the cost.

After all, in much of the world, Negroponte said, even \$100 "is still too expensive."

Avatars May Be the Next Big Online Thing

Get ready for avatars, the new digital alter-ego. They represent not only a new, \$200 million (and rapidly growing) IT market, they represent people in a personalized manner-in e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms and other internet services.

Avatars are highly customizable drawings or photos of people, animals, cartoon characters, inanimate objects of all kinds-basically anything that can be pictured-that online users employ as identification in communicating with their peers.

Avatars are can be created or acquired "as is"; they can be static or animated. They are primarily aimed at pre-teen and teenage users.

The avatar-as-personal-icon concept started in Korea about five years ago and is now beginning to catch on worldwide, said Tad Dagan, associate vice president at Comverse, Inc.

Dagan spoke at a seminar during the iHollywood Mobile Entertainment Summit at the Masonic Auditorium.

"These avatars are becoming big business because they are very important to people-especially young people, who are online so much of the time," Dagan said. "They want to represent themselves to their friends and people they meet online in a certain way. They want to be seen as cool and unique."

Dagan said there are few ways to show your individuality when you're communicating via SMS (instant messaging), chat rooms, e-mail and in blogs using text only.

"Teenagers want to be thought of as unique and creative, so these (customizable) avatars are attractive for them," Dagan said. "That's also why ring tones have become such big business. If you're the kid with the latest Madonna song on your phone, you're cool. If you have the standard Nokia tone, you're the class nerd."

Comverse, based in Wakefield, Mass., is one of the first U.S. companies to jump headlong into the avatar market.

Its new product, Klonies, is currently in beta and will be made available early next year for distribution to mobile operators and to the public at large, Dagan said.

With Klonies, subscribers create unique characters that reflect their personalities, moods and interests, Dagan said.

Subscribers can change and create new Klonies from their handsets and use them as their Caller ID, SMS signature, wallpaper, and in many other mobile and Web services, Dagan said.

A person using Klonies to build a personal avatar can select a body or face type, hair color, facial expression, clothing, background location-among numerous other options-to build the icon.

Once designed, it can be changed at will, and as often as desired.

"People can change them to fit their moods," Dagan said.

"Klonies ... could become as popular as ring tones among the valuable youth segment," Dagan said.

Other sites where avatars can be obtained are Avatarity, HotAvatars.com, and Avatara.com.

=~==~==

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.